
City of Reading City Council
Public Hearing
PRD Zoning Amendment
Wednesday, February 18, 2009
Council Chambers
5 p.m.

Opening Matters

Council President Spencer called the public hearing to order at 5:04 p.m.

Attendance

Council President V. Spencer
City Councilor S. Fuhs, District 1
City Councilor M. Goodman-Hinnershitz, District 2
City Councilor D. Sterner, District 3
City Councilor S. Marmarou, District 4
City Councilor M. Baez, District 5
City Councilor J. Waltman, District 6
City Solicitor S. Younger
City Clerk L. Kelleher
Mayor T. McMahon
Managing Director R. Hottenstein
City Planner A. Miller
CD Director M. Mayes
C. Schmehl, Consultant URDC

Purpose

Council President Spencer announced that this Public Hearing has been called in accordance with Section 609 of the Municipalities Planning Code (MPC) to obtain public input on the proposed amendment to the City of Reading Zoning Ordinance that will create a Planned Residential Development (PRD) overlay. This PRD zoning amendment is a proposed set of development regulations to control the possible future redevelopment of the southwest industrial area of the City - south of Penn Street, along both sides of 2nd Street, under the Bingaman Street bridge, along both sides of Canal Street and then extending to east of 7th Street. The proposed PRD overlay amendment would be an optional set of provisions that could be used, in place of the current zoning provisions. The proposed amendment would allow a mix of residential, recreation and

light commercial uses. This public hearing is not about any one particular development or one developer. The PRD overlay zoning amendment, if adopted, would apply to any developer or applicant who controlled land within the corridor. The City has not received any official development applications under this proposed zoning change.

Council President Spencer explained that the public comment period would begin after the presentation by the City Administration.

Presentation by City Administration

Council President Spencer introduced City Planner Andrew Miller and URDC Consultant Charlie Schmehl. Mr. Schmehl provided a summary of the proposed ordinance, noting that this amendment will provide opportunity for a planned residential development of a specified area. He stated that the proposed amendment will not change the existing zoning of the area or the zoning of the uses currently in place; however, should a developer obtain ten acres within the area, he will have the ability to use a mix of residential, recreation and light commercial zoning uses. The developer of parcels facing the riverfront will have to provide a riverfront path. All developers must undertake a traffic study. The proposed amendment also requires underground parking rather than surface parking lots.

Mr. Schmehl addressed the County Planning Board's comments and why some were used and others rejected, such as the suggestion to leave the recreation areas open 24 hours per day, rather than shutting the recreation areas down overnight.

Public Comment

Council President Spencer announced that seven citizens were registered to address Council this evening. He announced the public comment rules.

Michael Boylin, of Berks Packing, stated that his business utilizes four surrounding streets and will need to continue to use those streets to continue their operations. He also noted their future need for expansion without any restrictions on truck traffic. He expressed concern about the effect the redevelopment under the PRD will have on their business and operations.

Mark Mohn, of ReMAX and the Greater Reading Young Professional Political Committee noted the group's support for the PRD. He noted the increase in their organization's membership and their growing concern with the future direction of the Greater Reading area. He noted the organization's support of BEP's concept for the Corridor. He also noted the monetary contribution the organization made to support the security cameras in downtown Reading. He expressed the belief that the PRD will

encourage a fresh development initiative that will make Reading a destination.

Bill McShane, of Canal Street, passed on his opportunity to speak.

Jim Burdge, of Giannasca Development, expressed his support for the enactment of the PRD and the redevelopment it will inspire in Southwest Reading. He also expressed his support for the Federal Stimulus Package. He expressed the hope that the ordinance would be enacted on Monday, February 23rd.

Ed Giannasca, of Giannasca Development, noted his work initiated two and one half years ago. He thanked Council for holding this second public hearing and encouraged enactment of the proposed ordinance on Monday February 23rd.

Eric Mountz, of Shillington, stated that he works in traffic planning design and has worked with the Giannasca group to address traffic issues in the proposed redevelopment area. He expressed the belief that the redevelopment encouraged by the PRD can occur without any negative impact on commercial traffic.

David Stauffer, of United Correstack, expressed concern with the language regarding traffic in the proposed PRD. He stated that the current language could negatively impact commercial traffic and harm the continued operations of the existing businesses in this area.

Council President Spencer inquired if any other individual in the audience wished to comment. As no one expressed the desire to provide additional comment, the public comment period was closed.

Expected Date of Decision

Council President Spencer announced that the expected date of decision is either Monday, February 23rd or Monday March 9th.

Ms. Kelleher indicated that Legal Specialist Michelle Mayfield opined that the expected date of decision may need to be re-advertised seven days before enactment. Several people in the audience objected. Council President Spencer stated that Council realizes the community's concern and desire to see the PRD move forward.

Council President Spencer asked City Solicitor Younger to review and advise. City Solicitor Younger stated that the PaMPC regulations require the advertisement to be placed no more than 60 days nor less than 7 days before the date of consideration. He stated that he will speak with Legal Specialist Mayfield tomorrow about this issue.

Council Comment

Councilor Waltman expressed the belief that this issue should not be further delayed.

Councilor Fuhs noted that this is the second hearing at the request of the Law Department due to lack of proper posting. He noted that this second hearing allowed affected businesses to review and comment on the proposed ordinance. He noted the need for the traffic concerns expressed by the area businesses and the park closure concerns to be addressed by Mr. Schmehl and City Planner Miller.

Councilor Goodman-Hinnershitz agreed that this ordinance needs to move forward, as this is only the first step in a multi layered review process to follow.

Council President Spencer stated that the need to re-advertise will be addressed with the Solicitor and action will be occur as appropriate.

As no further business was brought forward, the public hearing was adjourned.

Respectfully submitted by Linda A. Kelleher City Clerk